

NLM Planning Process

In January, 1985 the Board of Regents of the National Library of Medicine resolved to develop a long range plan to guide the Library in wisely using its human, physical, and financial resources to fulfill its mission. The Board recognized the need for a well-formulated plan because of rapidly evolving information technology, continued growth in the literature of biomedicine, and the need to make informed choices of intermediate objectives that would lead NLM toward its strategic, long range goals. Not only would a good plan generate goals and checkpoints for management, actually a map of program directions, but it would also inform the various constituencies among the Library's users about the future it sought and could help to enlist their support in achieving that future.

At the Board's direction, a broadly based process was begun involving the participation of librarians, physicians, nurses, and other health professionals; biomedical scientists; computer scientists; and others whose interests are intertwined with the Library's. A total of 77 experts in various fields accepted invitations to serve on one of the five planning panels. Each panel addressed the future in one of the five domains that encompass NLM's current programs and activities. The domains, which provided the panels a framework for thinking about the future are:

1. Building and organizing the Library's collection
2. Locating and gaining access to medical and scientific literature
3. Obtaining factual information from data bases
4. Medical informatics
5. Assisting health professions education through information technology

The Library chose a planning model with three components. First, it incorporates a general, somewhat indistinct vision of the future 20 years from now in medicine, library and information science, and computer-communications technology. That environment cannot be forecast precisely, but we can speak of a "distant" goal.

That goal is seen as a societal objective whose attainment involves many organizations and agencies. NLM has a major role to play in achieving the goal and must plan its part. Second, while the 20-year goals are indistinct, there are opportunities for and impediments to achieving them. The opportunities and impediments can be more clearly envisioned because they appear to lie roughly 10 years away. Third, the specific steps that should be taken to remove the impediments and take advantage of the opportunities should be programmed for 3 to 5 years.

The planning process also involved participation within the Library. The Director provided his version of the future in the form of a "Scenario: 2005," which was distributed to panel members and Library staff. NLM staff prepared background documents that reported NLM achievements in the five domains, and reviewed current planning. Senior NLM staff members also acted as resource persons to the planning panels.

At the end of the planning process, each panel formulated recommendations and priorities for future NLM programs and activities in the domain under its purview. The five panel reports were reviewed by the Board of Regents in June 1986. The Board then asked the NLM staff to analyze and reconcile their findings, eliminating any duplications and consolidating the recommendations. Together with the planning panel reports, this synthesized plan presents the official Long Range Plan of the Board of Regents of the National Library of Medicine.